



Rural mobilities: Connecting movement and fixity in rural places[☆]



Paul Milbourne*, Lawrence Kitchen

School of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University, Cardiff CF10 3WA, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Mobility
Fixity
Place attachment
Rural
UK

Recent work within mobilities studies has pointed to the ways in which mobility shapes people's identities and everyday lives. Mobility is also inherently geographical in nature, not only in the sense that movements of people and objects transcend space but that the ubiquity of mobility within society raises important questions about the fixities of place. Much of the recent geographical scholarship on mobilities has focused on the city, with 'the urban' constructed as the archetypal space of hyper-mobility. Less attention has been given to mobilities in the context of rural spaces and places. In this paper, we suggest that mobility represents an equally important constituent of rural lifestyles and rural places. Our contention is that the stabilities of rurality, associated with senses of belonging, tradition and stasis, are both reliant on and undermined by rather complex forms of mobility. We draw on empirical materials from a recent community study in rural Wales to reveal the nature of these mobilities, including the diverse range of movements of people to, from and through rural places, the difficulties associated with practising everyday mobilities in rural settings, the increasing significance of virtual forms of mobility associated with the roll-out of digital technologies across rural spaces, and the complicated relationship between rural mobilities, immobilities and fixities.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Placing mobilities

"Mobility is just as spatial – as geographical – and just as central to the human experience of the world, as place."

(Cresswell, 2006, p.3)

"Being-on-the-move is a contemporary everyday life condition in the city and should as such be re-interpreted."

(Jensen, 2009, p.149)

"Mobility and migration hold the key to the future of the countryside."

(Bracey, 1959, p.232)

Mobilities have emerged as a significant field of study within the social sciences during the last decade. This is particularly the case in sociology where it has been claimed that 'the paradigm of mobilities...is becoming increasingly central to contemporary identity formation and re-formation' (Elliot and Urry, 2010, p.7). What is also apparent within this growing body of sociological literature is

an appreciation of both the temporalities and spatialities of mobility. Moving beyond the obvious observation that mobilities involve movements across space and between places, there is recognition that places and processes of place-making represent important components of mobilities. As Urry (2007) suggests, 'places are economically, politically and culturally produced through the multiple mobilities of people, but also of capital, objects, signs and information' (p.269).

The mobilities discourse has also been influential within human geography, where a distinctive body of work is now identifiable (see Cresswell, 1999, 2006; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Adey, 2006). As well as adding spatial twists to emerging mobility themes within sociology, human geographers have been at the forefront of the mobilities turn within the social sciences, pointing to the significance of spatial infrastructures, practices and imaginations to everyday and academic understandings of mobilities, as well as the importance of understanding place in more fluid terms. As Massey (1991) argued more than two decades ago, place needs to be approached less as a fixed entity and more as meeting space, as an intersection of flows of people and objects and, as such, continuously in a state of flux. More recently, she suggests that place needs to be approached as a 'constellation of processes rather than a thing' (2005, 141), emphasising its 'throwntogetherness'. Developing a relational understanding of space, Massey contends that space represents 'the sphere of a dynamic simultaneity, constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be

[☆] This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: MilbourneP@Cardiff.ac.uk (P. Milbourne).

determined (and therefore always undetermined) by the construction of new relations. It is always being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished...' (2005, 107). This approach resonates with Thrift's (1999) account of place based on 'relational materialism', within which he sees place as composed of a multitude of past associations but always dependent on 'further works of association to activate these associations, let alone make new ones. It follows that it can never be completed' (317).

More explicit engagements with ideas of mobility have also seen other geographers approaching place in more fluid terms – as in a constant state of becoming (Cresswell, 2002), as 'intersections of flows and movements' (Adey, 2006, p.88) and 'continually (re) produced through the mobile flows that course through and around them, bringing together ephemeral, contingent and relatively stable arrangements of people, energy and matter' (Edensor, 2011, p.190). As Merriman (2012) suggests, recent work on the geographies of mobility has moved beyond conventional ideas of movement happening in or across space to consider mobility as a process 'actively shaping or producing multiple, dynamic spaces...' (1). At the same time, it is recognised that 'the fluid and the fixed are relationally interdependent' (Jensen, 2009, p.146), with place providing 'spatial mooring' (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Longino, 1992) and a sense of belonging, home and fixity. While Merriman (2012) and Adey (2006) argue that these 'moorings' are themselves anything other than fluid, the relationship between mobility and place attachment has been subject to considerable discussion within the mobilities literature.

In an important intervention, Gustafson (2001) criticises the idea that place attachment and mobility are contradictory or mutual exclusive phenomena, suggesting that as well as providing freedoms and new opportunities, mobility can be associated with loss and uprootedness. Similarly, place attachment may signify 'roots, insecurity, and sense of place, but it may also...represent impoverishment and narrow-mindedness' (680; see also Fielding, 1992). Drawing on findings from qualitative research in Sweden, Gustafson states that while some of his participants perceived mobility as an ideal and particular aspects of place identity as traditional, others were able to 'combine the positive aspects of place attachment and mobility in everyday life as well as in their world views and biographical accounts' (68). As such, he suggests that researchers need to give more critical attention to the complex relations between mobility and fixity or, as he puts it, 'roots and routes'.

Others have questioned the significance of mobility within contemporary society. Hammar and Tamas (1997), for example, point to official statistics that indicate that only a minority of the population in most countries move away from their home places or regions. As such they call for increased research on immobilities, particularly the reasons that lie behind people's decision not to migrate. For Malmberg (1997), immobilities are associated with the employment of alternative time-space strategies that allow people to remain local but access more distant socio-economic opportunities. Perhaps the most obvious example is long-distance commuting, which has emerged as a substitute for migration and, for some people, an established way of life (see Green et al., 1999). Attention has also been given to the social and cultural attributes of place that may prevent out-migration, with Longino (1992) arguing that community context – involving social and cultural capital, quality of life and belonging – provides an important form of spatial mooring (see also Harner, 2001; Rowles, 1990).

The relations between mobility and place attachment have been challenged in another way by Barcus and Brunn (2010), who argue that out-migration does not necessarily diminish attachment to place. Broadening understandings of place attachment, they utilise the idea of *place elasticity* to embrace the possibilities of virtual relationships with distant places:

"The *elasticity of place* allows individuals to maximise economic or social opportunities distant from the place to which one is attached while at the same time perpetuating engagement with that place. Elasticity is possible today because of the extensive transportation and communication networks that facilitate greater interaction among people in distant places." (281)

Their focus is on young people leaving their home places, who they suggest may have moved away from their home community but whose identity with and attachment to that place remain strong. Moreover, they contend that these mobilities have the potential to create meaningful attachments to multiple places.

An interesting feature of recent studies of mobilities is their particular geographical coverage. The dominant spatial focus of research has been very much on urban places. Indeed, the city has emerged as the archetypal space of (hyper-) mobility given its association with 'speed, movement, energy and a 24/7 economy' (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011, p.8) and the 'emergence of high-tech "e-topias" of wireless urbanism' (Hannam et al., 2006, p.11). However, as Bracey's (1959) quotation, included at the start of this section, indicates, mobility has long represented a significant research theme within rural studies, both in terms of the spatial analysis of population movements between rural and urban places, and studies of the social and cultural impacts of migration in particular places (see Boyle and Halfacree, 1998; Milbourne, 2007; Phillips, 1993; Smith, 2007). Beyond these previous studies of migration, we argue that 'the rural' constitutes an extremely interesting case study of contemporary mobilities. Not only are rural places being reshaped by complex patterns of movement in similar ways to cities but rural mobilities offer new perspectives on the complex interplay between movement, fixity and place, as well as the everyday problematics of mobility.

Our intention in writing this paper is to provide critical engagement with emerging themes within the mobilities literature within the context of the everyday worlds of people living in rural places. We do this in two main ways. In the next section of the paper we provide a critical review of the ways in which the themes of migration and mobility have been approached by rural scholars. Following on from this we draw on materials from a recent research project to explore three forms of rural mobility: first, the complex movements of people to, from and through rural places; second, the everyday experiences of being on the move in rural places; and third, the problematics and potentialities of virtual forms of rural mobility.

2. From rural migration to rural mobilities

Recent years have witnessed calls for rural researchers to engage more critically with the mobilities turn within the social sciences. Rural population studies have been criticised for providing a rather narrow focus on uni-directional, long distance and permanent movements of people to rural places. What is needed, it is claimed, is a more sophisticated approach that is able to capture a broader range of spatial scales and temporalities associated with rural mobility, including:

"...movements into, out of, within and through rural places; journeys of a few yards as well as those of many hundreds of miles; linear flows between particular locations and more complex spatial patterns of movement; stops of a few hours, days or weeks as well as many decades; journeys of necessity and choice; economic and lifestyle-based movements; hyper- and im-mobilities; conflicts and complementarities; and uneven power relations and processes of marginalisation. It is these different mobilities, present in different combinations in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545849>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545849>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)